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Portfolio



Milton Berliner

'The Bridge at Remagen' Is Violent but Realistic

Despite the enormous and unexpected difficulties he ran into during the shooting of "The Bridge at Remagen," director John Guillermin has emerged with a first-rate war film notable not so much for its taut dramatization of one of World War II's most important Allied triumphs but for its realistic portrayal of the agony of war.

Filming of "The Bridge at Remagen," now playing at RKO Keith's, began in Czechoslovakia last spring. With just a month to go, the Russians invaded the country sending co-stars George Segal, Ben Gazzara, Robert Vaughn, Matt Clark and Bradford Dillman and 70 others in the crew rushing by taxi across the Austrian border.

They assembled for more filming in Hamburg, Germany, and wound up in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, for the final battle scenes.

Because the original Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, which collapsed 10 days after the Americans captured it, was never rebuilt, producer David Wolper spent two years looking for an existing bridge that would answer the purpose.

He finally spotted it 15 miles south of Prague on the Vltava River. The Czechs cooperated handsomely, ignoring East German press accusations that the film people were really CIA agents "intervening" with American tanks and weapons.

But the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops on Aug. 20 ended filming just before the climactic bridge battle was to

be completed. The company moved out leaving tanks, armor, 30 vehicles, guns and ammunition behind. These were recovered eventually.

The Czechs, said Wolper, were "fantastic" in bringing out film equipment and supplies.

It's not hard to imagine the awesome problems involved in getting production started again. Rebuilding a 100-foot-long railroad tunnel and bomb shelter (drawings, blueprints and photographs had been left in Prague) was not the least of them. How Wolper, Guillermin, executive production manager Milton Feldman, art director Alfred Sweeney and the rest of the technical staff accomplished this makes a story fully as dramatic as the one told in "The Bridge at Remagen."

The United Artists film, with its two hours plus of almost incessant shooting, bombing, cannonading and bloody death, is more for fans of action films than those who based on the book West Virginia are merely curious about military history. (The film is based on the book West Virginia Rep. Ken Hechler wrote about the incident as an Army historian.)

But even if you are repulsed by the sustained violence, you will certainly be moved by the performance of George Segal as the point platoon leader whose drawn, dirty and agonized face, as he leads his exhausted troops on one seemingly impossible mission after another on orders of an ambitious officer, becomes the very face of war.

D. Berliner, Milton
soc. 4.01.4 The Bridge
at Remagen

C.A. 4 - Czechoslovakia